

Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 13, 2020

Peter asked,
“Lord, how often
must I forgive?
As many as
seven times?”

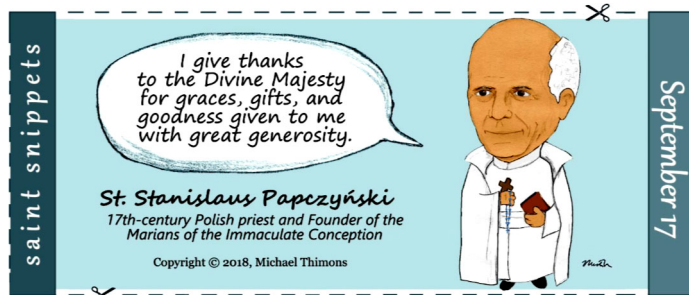
Matthew 18:21



Saint John Chrysostom (c. 344-407)

September 13

“Speaking truth to power” may have become just another cliché, but doing precisely that cost John “the Golden Mouth” (Chrysostom) his diocese and, after exile and a forced march, his health and life. “Renowned for eloquence, heroic in suffering” (Sacramentary), John’s scriptural insights still comfort and challenge. Mystical theologian, he bids Eastern Christians, whose principal Divine Liturgy bears his name, to lift up their hearts to “God ineffable, beyond comprehension, invisible, beyond understanding, existing forever, always the same.” Model pastor, he warns Roman Catholics in the Liturgy of the Hours not to neglect God-in-the-flesh: “Would you honor Christ’s body? Do not scorn his nakedness, honoring him here in church with silken robes, while neglecting him cold and naked outside. What use to burden Christ’s altar with golden chalices, while Christ himself starves to death? What use dressing the altar with gold-woven cloths, while denying the shivering Christ the clothes he needs? Do not adorn the church while ignoring your needy brother: he is the most precious temple of all!” (Saturday, Twenty-first Week in Ordinary Time). —Peter Scagnelli, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.



Forgiveness

Nearly ten years before, a son and father had parted ways when the business they shared went bankrupt. The son blamed the father. They did not speak to each other again. Then the father became seriously ill. The mother called the son and told him he had better come soon. The son walked sheepishly into the hospital room. The father motioned his son to him and whispered: “Did you ever think you could do anything that would keep me from loving you?”

Resentment and anger are foul things, the first reading from Sirach tells us. Remember the last things. Stop hating. Live by the commandments. As St. Paul writes to the Romans, we are to live for the Lord and die for the Lord.

Jesus’ parable in today’s Gospel reminds us of God’s compassion. The immense sin of humanity has been forgiven and stricken from the record. We are to forgive others in the same way.

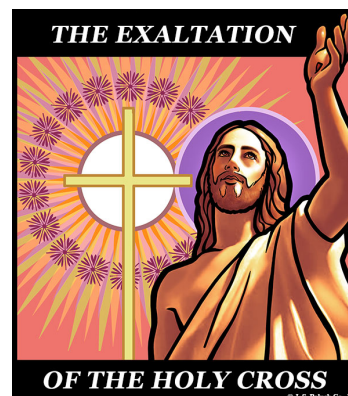
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Readings for the Week

Monday:	Nm 21:4b-9; Ps 78:1-2, 34-38; Phil 2:6-11; Jn 3:13-17
Tuesday:	1 Cor 12:12-14, 27-31a; Ps 100:1b-5; Jn 19:25-27 or Lk 2:33-35
Wednesday:	1 Cor 12:31 — 13:13; Ps 33:2-5, 12, 22; Lk 7:31-35
Thursday:	1 Cor 15:1-11; Ps 118:1b-2, 16ab-17, 28; Lk 7:36-50
Friday:	1 Cor 15:12-20; Ps 17:1bcd, 6-8b, 15; Lk 8:1-3
Saturday:	1 Cor 15:35-37, 42-49; Ps 56:10c-14; Lk 8:4-15
Sunday:	Is 55:6-9; Ps 145:2-3, 8-9, 17-18; Phil 1:20c-24, 27a; Mt 20:1-16a

Saints and Special Observances

Sunday:	Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time; Grandparents Day; Catechetical Sunday
Monday:	The Exaltation of the Holy Cross
Tuesday:	Our Lady of Sorrows
Wednesday:	Ss. Cornelius and Cyprian
Thursday:	St. Robert Bellarmine
Friday:	Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) 5781
Saturday:	St. Januarius; Blessed Virgin Mary



Today’s Readings

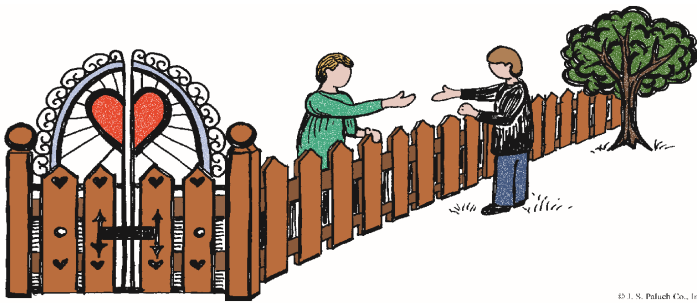
First Reading — Remember the commandments and hate not your neighbor (Sirach 27:30 — 28:7).

Psalm — The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion (Psalm 103).

Second Reading — Whether we live, or whether we die, we do so for the Lord (Romans 14:7-9).

Gospel — Forgive one another from your heart (Matthew 18:21-35).

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**Twenty-fourth Sunday
In Ordinary Time
September 13, 2020**
**Forgive your neighbor's injustice;
then when you pray,
your own sins will be forgiven.**

—Sirach 28:2

Treasures From Our Tradition

Our national memory will keep September 11 holy for generations to come, as we remember the innocent dead. Our memories of the attack on our nation are intertwined with memories of how we human beings are natural symbol-makers. In one parish, as a candlelight vigil ended, the assembly, without being instructed, took their candles and stood shoulder to shoulder, down the steps and along the city streets for a quarter mile. Slowly, people came out of their houses bearing tapers and candles. In the first hours of crisis, we stood vigil, we prayed from the heart, and we celebrated the human ability to draw light out of terrible darkness.

Stories of that terrible day necessarily drift to tales of heroism, courage, dignity, faith, solidarity, hope, community. The church learned long ago through hard experience that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” Perhaps the victims of 9/11 have gifts to bring that we are only just discovering as believers in a just and loving God. They are teaching us still, and today is a day for lighting candles at the table and being silent for a moment before the abundance of God’s gifts. Today reminds us that we are capable of acts of indescribable beauty even in the face of great evil.

—James Field, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.

“You missed the point,” we might be tempted to shout at the servant in today’s Gospel. His master had just forgiven a huge debt when he cried for mercy, and yet, when given the opportunity to show mercy himself, he instead acted violently and with retribution toward a fellow servant. Certainly, he had missed the point of his master’s merciful actions toward him, and suffered the consequences as a result. He missed the point. He is not alone, however. We all “miss the point” sometimes—we miss the point of God’s enduring covenant of love, and miss the mark in our call to live as though we are the Lord’s, for this is who we are.

Becoming More Like Christ

When Peter asked Jesus how many times he must forgive, he was probably stunned at Jesus’ response. Peter had asked, “As many as seven times?” Seven being the perfect number, surely this is enough forgiveness, Peter likely thought. Jesus’ response seems lavish beyond proportion. “I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times.” Jesus understands the fullness of God’s mercy and teaches that disciples are called to this same lavish outpouring of mercy. God showers compassion on humanity, beyond what might seem sensible or wise, yet we are called to “remember the Most High’s covenant, and overlook faults,” to give others the benefit of the doubt, knowing that God does this and more with us, each and every day. As recipients of God’s compassion, we must extend forgiveness and care beyond what might seem reasonable, because God’s love is beyond human reason.

How Much Is Too Much?

All this might seem just too much for us. It is one thing to recognize God’s enduring covenant love. It is another to grasp that we are called to the same sort of lavishness in mercy and forgiveness ourselves. Saint Paul helps us put this in perspective. We no longer live for ourselves, but for the Lord. In life and death, we belong to God and are called to be witnesses to God’s love, even in the most challenging circumstances. A friend turns away from us; we are called to turn toward the friend with mercy. A co-worker hurts us; we are called to approach him or her with forgiveness, seventy-seven times no less! God’s love is always about what is just and right. As God’s people, we live and die for the Lord, forgive even when it doesn’t make sense to do so, and leave the rest in God’s hands.

Sir 27:30 — 28:7; Ps 103:1–2, 3–4, 9–10, 11–12; Rom 14:7–9; Mt 18:21–35

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